

Message Text

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ACTION AGR-20

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FOR AGRICULTURE

E. O. 11652: N/ A

TAGS: EAGR, PINT, UR

SUBJ: FOOD SITUATION IN USSR: LOWER VOLGA

REF: MOSCOW 2738; STATE 043786

1. EMBASSY OFFICIERS TRAVELING IN LOWER VOLGA REGION, VOLGOGRAD, MARCH 18, 19, AND ASTRAKHAN, MARCH 20, 21, FOUND POTATO RATIONING BY CARD SYSTEM AT STATE STORES IN VOLGOGRAD, GOOD SUPPLY OF POTATOES IN ASTRAKHAN, AND POOR MEAT AND BUTTER SUPPLIES IN BOTH CITIES CONFIRMING REPORTS DESCRIBED IN MOSCOW 2738, MARCH 13. LOCAL POPULATION DID NOT APPEAR TO REGARD SITUATION AS ABNORMAL. FOR SEASON.

2. OBSERVATIONS CONCERNING PRINCIPAL COMMODITIES IN BOTH CITIES AS FOLLOWS:

A. VOLGOGRAD: BREAD OF ALL TYPES, SAUSAGE, CHEESE AND OTHER STAPLES AVAILABLE AT ALL STATE STORES WITH NO LINES. POTATO SUPPLY IN STATE STORES APPEARED TO BE BIGGEST PROBLEM WITH PURCHASES RATIONED BY CARD SYSTEM TO 20 KILOS PER MONTH PER CARD BEARER. NO POTATOES SEEN IN STATE STORES VISITED BUT CUSTOMERS STATED THAT ANOTHER STATE STORE (NOT VISITED) DID HAVE POTATOES. BUTTER NOT SEEN IN STATE STORES, MILK AVAILABLE IN MOST STORES WITH SMALL LINES. MEAT SUPPLIES WERE POOR, ONLY BACON FAT AND SAUSAGE IN GOOD SUPPLY. USUAL SEASONAL VEGETABLES IN STATE STORES (CABBAGE, CARROTS AND BEETS) ALSO IN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SHORT SUPPLY, AVAILABLE ONLY EARLY MORNING.
IN VOLGOGRAD FREE KILKHOZ MARKET, POTATOES READILY AVAILABLE
BUT NOT MANY TAKERS AT 50-80 KOPECKS PER KILO. ONLY PORK
READILY AVAILABLE AT 3.50 RUBLES PER KILO. BUTTER NOT AVAILABLE.
CABBAGE, BEETS AND CARROTS EACH AVAILABLE AT 50 KOPECKS PER
KILO. EGGS AVAILABLE AT 10 FOR 1.20-1.30.

B. ASTRAKHAN: STATE STORES BETTER STOCKED THAN IN VOLGOGRAD.
FAIR QUALITY POTATOES READILY AVAILABLE IN UNLIMITED QUNATITIES
IN ALL STORES FOR 16 KOPECKS PER KILO. CABBAGE, BEETS, CARROTS
AND ONIONS ALSO READILY AVAILABLE. MEAT SUPPLY IN STATE STORES
IDENTICAL TO VOLGOGRAD - POOR. MILK MORE SCARCE IN ASTRAKHAN
BUT PEOPLE QUERIED CLAIMED IT WAS USUALLY AVAILABLE IN EARLY
MORNINGS. BUTTER SEEN IN ONLY ONE STORE AT AIRPORT SELLING
FOR 4.20 RUBLES PER KILO WITH NO RATIONING. OTHER SHOPPERS
SAID THAT IN ADDITION TO NOVEMBER- DECEMBER RATIONING OF POTATOES,
BUTTER HAD BEEN RATIONED BY CARD SYSTEM FROM NOVEMBER UNTIL
EARLY MARCH, AND WAS NOW VERY SPORADICALLY AVAILABLE WITH
LIMIT OF 200 GRAMS TO CUSTOMERS.

ASTRAKHAN FREE MARKET (BAZAAR) HAD LARGE QUANTITY OF PORK
AT 2.80 PER KILO. DELIVERY OF FOUR SIDES OF BEEF CAUSED MINOR
STAMPEDE TO FORM A LINE OF SOME 50 PEOPLE WITHIN 30 SECONDS.
ONE SHOPPER STATED THAT BEEF AVAILABLE VIRTUALLY EVERY DAY, BUT
ALWAYS IN LIMITED QUANTITY. MILK SOLD FOR 50 KOPECKS PER LITER.
NO BUTTER WAS AVAILABLE. GOOD QUALITY BEETS, CABBAGE, AND CARROTS
AVAILABLE AT 40 KOPECKS PER KILO. ONE BOX OF FRESH TOMATOES
SELLING FOR 8 RUBLES PER KILO. FRESH CUCUMBERS AT 6 RUBLES PER
KILO.

COMMENT: PEOPLE IN STREETS GAVE WIDELY VARYING RESPONSES TO
QUESTIONS ABOUT FOOD SUPPLY WHICH SUGGESTS UNREALIABILITY OF
ISOLATED
REMARKS. CHAOTIC DELIVERY SYSTEM AND IRREGULAR ENFORCEMENT OF
PURCHASE LIMITS BY SALES CLERKS COULD EXPLAIN MUCH OF CONFLICTING
INFORMATION. SOME SAID FOOD SITUATION SAME EVERY YEAR AT THIS
TIME, OTHERS SAID THAT THIS YEAR WAS ESPECIALLY BAD. INTERESTIN-
GLY, SEVERAL THOUGHT MORE BUTTER AVAILABLE UNDER RATIONING BY
CARD SYSTEM. THAN NOW WHEN CUSTOMERS SUPPOSEDLY LIMITED TO 200
GRAMS PER PURCHASE.
DUBS

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